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| Reviewed by: | Quality Assurance and Academic Governance Council (QAAGC) | |
| Effective From: | 23/01/2020 | Renew Date: 07/02/2025 |
| Version: | 001 | |

1. POLICY STATEMENT

Academic integrity is integral to the Forus Training approach to teaching, learning and assessment. Forus Training staff, trainers and learners are encouraged to form a community and culture of learning with the core values of honesty, trust, fairness, respect, responsibility and courage. These values are mutually reinforcing and form the foundations for the organisation's approach, creating a vibrant academic culture where staff and trainers alike are encouraged to engage in learning which contributes to effective practice and new approaches in the teaching and learning space. This policy also extends to Blended and Online Learning modes of delivery so that online learners attending virtual classrooms for tutorial sessions will not be disadvantaged in any way.

3. SCOPE

This academic strategy supports Forus Training's organisational objectives which embody the following academic areas:

- **Teaching, Learning and Assessment:** All teaching and learning provision, including classroom, blended and online.
- **Research and Innovation:** All research and knowledge exchange activity.
- **Learner Experience:** All elements of the learner experience including formal teaching, assessment and learner support.
- **Externality:** A provider-owned quality assurance system which makes appropriate use of external advisors who are independent of the provider and who are expertly qualified to provide relevant and impartial direction and make national and international comparisons in the context of benchmarking standards.



Forus Training - 5 Core Organisational Objectives:

1. LEARNERS

To provide a supportive, dynamic learning environment for all learners, one that assists learners in:

- a. Enabling each learner to reach their ambition(s),
- b. Adding currency and an 'occupational' value to their CVs,
- c. Developing the skill of reflective practice and understand how to use it for both professional and personal growth,

2. FORUS TRAINING TEAM

To ensure, empower and enable the Forus Training team's understanding of 'learner consciousness' and the industries to which our training and education approaches are aligned through:

- a. A uniform, coherent and embedded approach to understanding our learners' needs,
- b. Appreciation of what it means to get to know and value the learners,
- c. Fostering a responsive and proactive relationship with learners encouraging engagement, irrespective of the circumstances presenting,
- d. Offering ongoing professional development so staff are appropriately enabled and trained in their role as custodians and facilitators of accredited training and education.

3. INDUSTRY

To develop strong connections with those industries and sectors to which fields of learning align via ensuring indicative content and emerging curriculums are reflective of and reviewed in line with current industry standards, regulations, legislation and evidence-based practice, through the provision of appropriately pitched opportunities to learners so essential workplace skills can be developed, specifically in the:

- a. Early Years Sector,
- b. Health and Social Care Sector,
- c. Primary School Sector (via Special Needs Assisting programmes).

4. QUALITY ASSURANCE

To promote a quality assurance framework that ensures the safeguarding of learner, staff, organisational and programme integrity. This includes but is not limited to:



- a. The application of strategic governance so as to have a mechanism to consider strategic insights as the primary drivers of self-evaluation, review and continuous improvement,
- b. A robust approach to recruiting, selecting, developing and the orientation of roles within the Forus Training team,
- c. The coordination, management and monitoring of teaching, learning and assessment,
- d. The management of administrative and procedural activities with a specific emphasis on information and data collection and retention,
- e. The transparency of information to all stakeholders, including the general public and collaborative partnerships.

5. FINANCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE

To manage commercial governance over the organisation and ensure appropriate resources are readily available to:

- a. Promote an effective, appropriately resourced learning experience,
- b. Respond to the evolution in industries to which Learners are progressing towards,
- c. Promote organisational sustainability,
- d. Promote organisational growth.

4. PURPOSE AND POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

Forus Training's Academic Strategy provides a roadmap for its future teaching and learning direction. The primary objective is to ensure the provision of training and education is accurately reflective of learner need so as to support learner engagement and as such, further developing learning and teaching strategies and building links with the external community, including industry. Benchmarking is a key activity to achieving academic success.

Forus Training have the following academic ambitions:

1. **A Connected Curriculum** - Forus Training research, both locally and nationally, employability and industry-related changes and by doing so, build on existing effective practice in the scoping of provider profile and award availability, design and validation.



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2. **Curriculum Alignment** - Forus Training constructively self-assess award assessment methods, instruments and teaching practices to ensure learning objectives, (and assessment related language) are accurately calibrated.
3. **Learner Registration** - Forus Training establishes a learner registration plan which will align with learner recruitment targets.
4. **Academic Governance** - When and where required, Forus Training reforms its academic governance to ensure that innovation is enabled, coherence is restored and risk is reduced.
5. **Blended learning** - further developing learning and teaching strategies to incorporate an effective blended learning mode of learning to include a clear statement of purpose, instructional design, course content and an effective IT infrastructure to support this and manage potential risks, e.g. academic integrity.
6. **Fully Online** - Further development and review of systems, policies and protocols in order to support and manage the potential delivery of Fully Online programmes.

Blended Learning Scope

At Forus Training we use the term 'blended learning' to describe the combination of live, instructor-led training with the best features of online accessibility and the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) to enhance learning and teaching activities. In this context, the following definition is used to inform policy and practice in relation to blended learning:

Blended learning is realised in teaching and learning environments where there is an effective integration of different modes of delivery, models of teaching and styles of learning as a result of adopting a strategic and systematic approach to the use of technology combined with the best features of face to face interaction. (Krause, 2007)

At Forus Training, we believe that blended learning offers the opportunity to encourage the personalisation of eLearning methods. It broadens the Learner experience by supporting 'anytime, anywhere' learning and reshapes the role of the Trainer to facilitate learning while maximising the educational impact for Learners.

At Forus Training blended learning typically involves:



- A portion of learning occurring online with the Learner being able to manage the pace at which they learn,
- A portion of the learning occurs via Trainer-led practices such as webinars, and face to face sessions. (Lawless, 2021)
- In keeping with QQI guidelines in relation to Blended Learning, our blended learning practices always involve a combination of in-person interaction with the learners and an element of online learning.

In terms of delivery, Learners will be based in Ireland with a maximum class size of 20 for each group. Using the ABC methodology each programme in the timeframe 2022-2024 will be evaluated to match learning activities with learning outcomes, checking its suitability to be adapted for blended learning. This evaluation will benefit from our broad experiences of delivering blended learning throughout the time of the pandemic (2020 - 2022). We currently envisage that 50% of programmes will be delivered through blended learning and 50% through conventional classroom delivery. Current learner enquiries indicate a high level of interest in blended learning.

Rationale and Business Case for Blended Learning

The experience of the recent Covid-19 pandemic included a pivot away from traditional lecture-style teaching towards online delivery. All training providers had to adapt to these emergency circumstances and this has provided an opportunity to explore blended learning as a future means of programme delivery. Based on these experiences, Forus Training has identified the following drivers for blended learning provision:

- Flexibility - many learners welcome the convenience of being able to study at a time and place that suits them, organising this around their own work, family commitments, etc., and avoiding the time and cost involved in travelling to an education centre.
- Learner engagement - an online approach provides the opportunity to promote greater learner engagement by replacing traditional lecture-led training with online tutorial sessions. Pre-class reading can be placed on the VLE so that tutorials can focus on deeper analysis or discussion of course topics (Bowyer & Chambers, 2017). This promotes active learning in tutorials through facilitated small group discussions, problem-solving, peer learning, and other more meaningful activities (Garrison & Kanuka, 2004).



- Enhanced teaching materials and delivery - a digital learning environment promotes innovation in the creation of engaging course content, addressing different learning styles and methods, online discussion forums, Q&A and survey-type responses, online assessment tools, tracking learner engagement, customised learner supports and a focus on learner satisfaction.

Blended learning implementation must focus on planning, Trainer upskilling, coherent programme design and ongoing evaluation (Garrison & Kanuka, 2004). This involves a detailed consideration of the IT, financial, HR, and course scheduling areas alongside more traditional teaching and curriculum matters.

Therefore, within Forus Training, business planning for successful blended learning delivery includes:

- Content delivery & IT resources - LMS, Zoom, design considerations, course framer and content;
- Teaching styles & content scheduling - course delivery plans, split between synchronous and asynchronous learning sessions;
- Assessment tools & methods - planning for online assessment and ensuring academic integrity;
- Staff training & learner supports - customised training for teaching online, adapting learner supports for online delivery, admin training, etc., and
- Financial & resource planning - covering both initial development, platform/venue costs, and course rollout/delivery phases.

Forus Training also recognises that, although current evidence indicates an interest and popularity of blended learning, it may not be suitable for everyone. In planning for blended learning delivery, Learners need to be guided through a range of issues, including:

- Ability to learn independently as well as in groups - organisation and planning skills, or whether there is an individual need for social interaction in learning situations, etc.;
- Access to adequate broadband and IT skills - the quality of internet access will directly impact on individual Learner participation in online learning and basic digital competencies are required to use the LMS, Zoom, etc.; and
- Identifying any additional support or special requirements - ideally these are discussed pre-course with the Learner but the Trainer and support team must be alert and able to intervene if the need for additional supports arises.

Clearly, blended learning will not be suitable for all learners so Forus Training will plan to provide a suite of programmes, both traditional classroom and online blended delivery, in order to meet Learner and market requirements.



5. PROCEDURES AND PRACTICES

Forus Training enhance its teaching and learning strategies to encourage:

- Increased 'visualisation' in academic learning by use of more visual, practical and technology based learning experiences,
- Increased cooperative learning using 'learner groups' and to support the equality and diversity of the learning experience,
- Increased Q&A based learning through inquiry based activities,
- Increased learner led 'differentiated learning',
- Increased professional development for Trainers specifically in the areas of educational technology, online safety and competency in using a range of effective and alternative teaching and learning strategies.

Benchmarking

Forus Training embraces benchmarking as a comparative assessment performance tool in measuring academic success. In addition to internal benchmarking (such as performance and practice benchmarking in the form of programme monitoring and reviews and self-evaluations), Forus Training liaises with other external further education and training providers and industry. Such networking is generally informal using a quantitative *feed-forward* approach whereby Forus Training share information and data across a range of variables including, but not limited to: major award associated components (how one component may follow on from another in delivery); how learner profiles within specific fields of study vary from one year to the next and grade distribution analysis and how sectoral changes can enhance the curriculum and content of the teaching and learning process. The access to the QQI Info-graphics also informs much more qualitative data led benchmarking activity. Forus Training aims to evolve its approach to benchmarking and is exploring a custom approach to benchmarking which would involve a collaborative network of providers, facilitated by a third party to coordinate data collection and analysis applicable to all stakeholders.

The outcomes identified through benchmarking are of particular significance in ensuring absolute academic integrity as they assist Forus Training in reviewing current processes and standards in the context of policy, procedures and relevant legislation and regulative directives. Forus Training use these



findings to revise and/or create measurable standards for teaching and learning to which learners, trainers and the overall Forus Training learning experience and academic success can then be monitored, reviewed and evaluated against.

6. RELATED DOCUMENTS

A. LEGISLATION / STANDARDS

1. Qualifications & Quality Assurance (Education & Training) Act 2012
2. Further Education & Training Act 2013
3. QQI Insights: Quality in Irish Further Education & Training – September 2019

7. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

It is the role of the Quality Assurance and Academic Governance Council to ensure that this policy is implemented.

8. COMMUNICATION PLAN

This policy is communicated at induction and is in the terms of reference of the Quality Assurance and Academic Governance Council.

9. ACTIONS TO BE FOLLOWED IF THE POLICY IS NOT IMPLEMENTED

The WIN policy / non-conformance procedure is followed when this policy is not adhered to. Lack of adherence to this policy may have implications for Forus Training's status as an organisation whose policies and procedures are approved by QQI in order for Forus Training to offer validated programmes.

10. CONTACT INFORMATION

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| Amendment History | | | |
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| Amendment summary sheet | | | |
| Revision | Date | Amendment summary | Training Requirements |
| | 23/01/2020 | Initial release | Read and Review |
| | 26/2/2021 | This policy extends to Blended Learning courses. Our online learners will not be disadvantaged. | Read and Review |
| | 29/06/2023 | Reviewed and approved by QA Officer. No changes. | Read and Review |
| | 07/02/2024 | Updated to reflect adherence to QQI's evolving definitions of blended learning (element of in-person and element of online) | Read and Review |
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